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SUBJECT Bob Woodward Interviewed

ROBERT SIEGEL: In his new book on the Central Intelligence Agency, reporter Bob Woodward writes of arguments within the CIA about the role of covert operations. The late Director William Casey wanted action. His deputies pointed to congressional restrictions. The most important being the ban on CIA assassinations.

BOB WOODWARD: President Reagan signed his own executive order saying no one in the government will participate, directly or indirectly, in assassinations or assassination planning. Now, I have documents, which are quoted extensively in the book, done by the intelligence agencies and the State Department, saying, "Maybe we can spur in Libya the dissident military to assassinate Qaddafi." They used the word. They don't use a euphemism. They don't say "eliminate." They say "assassinate."

I would say this is just one more example where the rules that are promulgated to the public, no assassination involvement, are not adhered to. For somebody, on whatever level, to write that in a document means that, somehow, the green light has been given.

SIEGEL: And yet you do write that the red light was sufficiently perceived, that other intelligence agencies -- the French, the Israelis -- at various times disparage American capacity for covert actions because they will not assassinate.

WOODWARD: That's one of the reasons. Absolutely. And the question is and what this is all about is: How do we, as a government deal with doing our dirty work? Are we going to do it? Are we not going to do it? Are we going to wink? Are we going to walk in the garden and get some other intelligence

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service to do it? Are we going to pass Swiss bank account numbers between the CIA Director and ambassadors? Is that what we want? Or are we going to adhere to our own rules?

SIEGEL: One of the criticisms of this book is that it might compromise U.S. security by its disclosures of intelligence operations. And one critics who charges that, did on our air, is Casey's predecessor at CIA under President Carter, Admiral Stansfield Turner.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: I think there are a lot of revelations in the book that will be quite harmful to American foreign policy and to future intelligence efforts. I'm sorry about that and I wish Bob Woodward had not published some of the things that he did.

WOODWARD: Well, as I say in the beginning of the book, there's no way to tell this story, no way to tell a laundered version of it for it to have any meaning. The CIA did some things, a lot of things, that were questionable. And to make that clear to people, you have to describe what they are.

I have been very careful about sources and methods.

SIEGEL: Let me ask you about William Casey, who's the central figure of the story. A man who -- you were constantly describing things about Casey which led him to be taken less than completely seriously out in public: his appearance, a kind of chronic dishevelment; his mumbling. Yet, on the inside you found one of the shrewdest and most respected characters in the Administration.

WOODWARD: All you had to do was talk to him once, listen to one of his speeches, read some of his writings, and you couldn't help but reach the conclusion that there was a very powerful intellect behind that man.

SIEGEL: One of the most memorable comments on Casey, probably for the ages, will be Oliver North telling the Iran-Contra Committee that Casey was interested in having a, whatever it was, off-the-shelf independent intelligence unit that could perform covert actions. That jibes with what you learned about Casey, or not?

WOODWARD: Absolutely. In fact, I found, and the book describes in great detail, that it wasn't something Casey wanted or anticipated; it's something that Casey had working with the Saudi intelligence service. He got them to try to assassinate Sheik Fadlallah, who was the head terrorist, or the head of the Party of God in Beirut. This did not work. As the Saudi Ambassador here is quoted as saying, "We couldn't kill him, so we

bribed him." They took a couple of million dollars to Sheik Fadlallah and they said, "Will you stop your participation in these car-bomb efforts directed against the Saudi or American facilities? Will you stop this if we give you two million dollars?"

The Sheik said, "I want food, medicine, scholarships for my followers." And to this day, there has not been another car-bombing.

That bribery worked.

Then they turned to the hostage issue. How do you get the hostages back? Who do you bribe? The Iranians, who had influence over the group, or the families in Lebanon who held the hostages.

SIEGEL: Your relationship with the Director of Central Intelligence, Casey, has provoked some comment. Some of it has been skeptical. For example, this is what former CIA official Cline said.

RAY CLINE: What is most scandalous is to imply that a lot of it came from Bill Casey. I think that is absolutely wrong. It's ridiculous to think that Casey would give classified information or confidential views to Bob Woodward, whom I know he considered a danger to the CIA.

WOODWARD: Look, it's a matter of record at the CIA, many of the contacts and meetings I had with him. As I've made clear, Casey was not the Daniel Ellsberg of this book, wheeling in grocery carts of documents, or anything like that. But he was a participant.

SIEGEL: When Casey became Director of Central Intelligence, he inherited a lot of people high up from the Carter and Ford years who were averse to such things and who were averse, certainly, to crossing Congress, and maybe had their own conscientious objections. What does Webster inherit in the way of senior CIA people? Are they of the Casey mold, who want to go out and be an action agency, or are they of the old group?

WOODWARD: That's important question. I think, as one of the people in the book describes rather poignantly, that the CIA is going through a nervous breakdown, to a certain extent. You have, when Casey was there, half of the people, or a group of people following him around and saying, "How do we do it? Yes, sir. We want to get that done." And half of the people saying, "Hey, wait a minute. This leads us into the pits again. We're going to get in trouble with the public and the Congress."

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I suspect most of the people in the CIA are sitting there waiting for somebody to come out and lead them and say, "We're not going to bend our own rules. We're not going to hide from ourselves about what we are really doing. We've got to get it out in the open, to a certain extent."

SIEGEL: Bob Woodward, thank you very much.

RENEE MONTAGNE: The book is called "Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1980-1987."